



## THE INTERPLAY BETWEEN A CONFUCIAN-HERITAGE CULTURE AND TEACHERS' SENTIMENTS AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS INCLUSION IN MACAU

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### Abstract:

Macau Special Administration Region (Macau SAR) is in the process of revising legislation concerning special and inclusive education. While the institutional discourse revolves around establishing inclusive education, it is unclear as to how the proposed changes will enable or depress this from occurring. This research, therefore, examined teachers' attitudes towards inclusion as an indication of how well the new legislation may be received. Specifically, it investigated the interplay between 508 teachers working in private schools in Macau, that identified themselves as being inclusive schools, and teachers' sentiments and attitudes towards the acceptance of inclusion and the role that Confucian values might play in shaping these attitudes. Discussion focusses on four key outcomes that need to be addressed if a significant improvement in including all children in regular schools in Macau is to be achieved. These include the need (1) to clarify the concept of inclusion at government, school, and teacher levels as it currently has ambiguous meaning; (2) to provide teachers with more opportunities to have systematic contacts with students with SEN, as this is crucial to improving their sentiments and attitudes toward people with disability; (3) to provide professional learning about inclusive education with better partnerships between teacher education institutions and schools to bridge theory and practice; and (4) to review the hidden

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influence of the subtle levels of time-honoured Confucian beliefs in Macau, which are not manifest nor easily detected but possibly have a deep impact on day-to-day practices.

**Keywords:** inclusive education, special education needs, disability, inclusion, Macau SAR, cultural values, attitudes, Confucian heritage cultures

## 1. Introduction

Macau is a Special Administrative Regions (SAR) of China, located on the western side of the Pearl River Delta and 64 km away from Hong Kong SAR. It is characterised by a mixture of Western and Eastern lifestyles and an overall prosperity associated with the gaming and hospitality industry. With an area of 30 square kms, the city is considered the most densely populated region in the world yet has a remarkably low unemployment rate of 2% (DSEC, 2017), being forced to import labour from the neighbouring regions. Chinese make up 95% of Macau's population and the remaining 5% is composed by other ethnic groups. Among these are immigrants from the Philippines, Portugal, Indonesia and Myanmar. Due to its historical development under the Portuguese administration until December 1999, which led to the establishment of many independent private schools Macau has not developed a unified educational system. In the school year of 2018-2019 there were 77 schools providing regular education. Only 10 of these were public schools. The majority of students (96.17%) were educated in private schools.

Following the adoption of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities by the People's Republic of China in 2006 (UN, 2006), Macau has been promoting new efforts to implement the principles and practices of inclusive education delineated by the United Nations treaty. In Macao SAR, the integration of students with special education needs (SEN) started in a few public schools in the 1990's (Forlin, 2010; So, 2005). Since 2014, the government has been providing basic training in special and inclusive education for regular teachers. The move towards a more inclusive educational approach, however, is still in its infancy. While several schools claim they are inclusive environments, in 2017, teachers in Macau reported that they did not have regular contact with students with SEN, they had limited teaching experience, a lack of knowledge about disability and limited practical skills required to support students with SEN (Teixeira, Correia, Monteiro, Kuok & Forlin, 2017).

### 1.1 Approaches towards children with SEN in cultures of Confucius heritage

In societies of Confucian-heritage culture (CHC), such as Vietnam, Singapore, Korea, Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Macau, the underpinning values shared by the community propel different ways of addressing disability issues. Contrasting with the accelerated modernization and the show business glamour in Macau, the mainstream community of Chinese descent remains attached to Confucian overarching values and

beliefs, especially in the areas of family and social relationships (McBrayer & McBrayer, 2014; Yuen, Park, Chen & Cheng, 2017). These beliefs pose challenges to education stakeholders entangled between their deep-rooted East Asian approaches toward disability and the Anglo-Western demands from the United Nations (Malinen & Savolainen, 2008). This situation is rendered more complex when there are opposing forces lying within the Confucian approaches to disability.

In Confucian heritage, *“educating a child is emphasised as a way of raising a good member of society and is regarded as the single most important parental obligation”* (Park, 2012, p. 3). Education is a stepping-stone in the advancement of the individual, the family and the society, allowing for socio-economic growth and status. Parents long for the best possible education for their children as an educated child resonates the collective endeavour of the family. By achieving high academic results at school, sons and daughters honour their parents, and by being able to take care of them as they get older, the youngsters prove their filial piety which play and extremely important role in the social tissue (Phillipson, 2007; Chiang & Hadadian, 2007). As parents from Confucian heritage are judged according to their ability to educate their children, they show a significantly greater involvement in their children's education and hold higher educational expectations comparatively with other parents, as for example European and American parents (Chen, 2001; Chiang & Hadadian, 2007; Chong, 2007). According to Wang, Tsai, Chu, Lei, Chio and Lee (2015, p.3) *“Chinese students often have higher pressures and demands relating to academic performance placed upon them by their parents and the wider society”*.

When a child does not match up to the family's expectations and is found to have a disability, how do parents react? According to Park and Chesla, parents are *“expected to feel responsible and even blamed for their failure as parents”* (2011, p. 306). In the Confucian tradition, in which the parent-child dyad prevails over the husband-wife dyad (Park & Chesla, 2011), a child with a disability is not just seen as failing to contribute to the family's material prosperity but also seen as a misfortune that befell the family (Chiang & Hadadian, 2007). Tait, Hu, Fung, Sweller and Wang (2016) found that Mainland China and Hong Kong SAR parents' fear of community stigma meant they have a difficult time coming to terms with the fact that their child is different, especially if they need to disclose the matter in front of strangers such as teachers.

Macau parents of children with special education needs (SEN) are reluctant to approach teachers to disclose their concerns regarding their child's learning abilities and are usually unwilling to disclose personal issues when called by the school to discuss their child's school report, indicating that cultural dimensions might influence the process of moving from exclusionary to inclusionary settings in Macau SAR (Teixeira et al., 2017). An environment where most of the schools are selective, the teachers are sparsely exposed to students with SEN and the parents of children with disabilities choose to protect their child from an unreceptive environment rather than stand up for their right to get the best possible education (Campbell & Uren, 2011). This presents substantial challenges to the enactment of the upcoming educational changes.

Although findings from cultures of non-Confucian heritage show that children with SEN and their parents face day to day barriers to school and social participation, well-being and achievement (Glazzard, 2013; Yssel, Engelbrecht, Oswald, Eloff & Swart, 2007), these barriers might be greater in societies where the Confucian heritage values influence the ways of feeling and reasoning about individual differences (Tait, Mundia & Fong, 2014). While Confucian thought protects its vulnerable members through a moral value claimed for more than a thousand years (Gu, 2016; Pang & Richey, 2006), this responsibility has not been adopted by the broader society. Forlin, writing about inclusive education in Macau, stated that the Confucian philosophy cares for, tolerates and accepts people with disabilities, “... *but this does not necessarily transfer to including them in the same schools as their non-disabled peers*” (2010, p.1).

While Macau SAR does not experience financial hardships as many other places worldwide and, therefore, allocation of resources is apparently not a major obstacle to the implementation of inclusion, the specificity of the school system, the impact of Confucian culture, deep-rooted traditions and technocratic narratives that shape school cultures are making it difficult to transform schools into inclusive environments. Considering that teachers in Macao have been sparsely exposed to students with SEN and report not having received sufficient training about special or inclusive education (Monteiro, Kuok, Correia, Forlin, & Teixeira, 2018), their perceptions of students with SEN may be prompted by factors other than knowledge and experience, such as cultural values, beliefs and long-standing social practices.

The role of cultural values and beliefs in shaping teachers' attitudes toward inclusion has been explored overseas (Thaver & Lim, 2014). Research conducted in several countries has found a positive correlation between teachers' experience of inclusive classrooms and their attitudes toward people with disability (Avramidis, Bayliss & Burden, 2000; Burke & Sutherland, 2004; Forlin & Sin, 2017). A study completed in Australia, Canada, Hong Kong and Singapore (Forlin, Loreman, Sharma & Earle, 2007) concluded that training in special or inclusive education and teaching experience by teachers with students with SEN correlate with teachers' positive attitudes and positive sentiments about inclusion. Research on the specific features of Confucian heritage and its impact on various social domains, as for instance learners' international success in academic fields, is quite prolific (Yuen, Park, Chen & Cheng, 2017). There is, however, limited research on how Confucian values might influence the sentiments and attitudes of Macao teachers toward disability and inclusion and few scientific papers have been published about special and inclusive education in Macao.

This research, therefore, aimed to explore the following research questions: 1) What are Macau teachers' sentiments and attitudes towards acceptance of inclusive settings? 2) What is their perceived knowledge about and experience of inclusive education? and 3) What is the relationship between Confucian-heritage culture and teachers' perceptions?

## 2. Method

### 2.1 Participants

Participants were a purposeful sample of teachers working in private schools in Macau, that identified themselves as being inclusive schools, during the school year of 2015-2016. Out of 754 teachers who were invited to complete the questionnaire, 508 questionnaires were returned giving a total response rate of 69% with teachers aged from 25 to 46 years. Regarding training, 38% indicated they had no training in special or inclusive education, 49% had received at least 30 hours training, with a small proportion having extensive training (13%). Of the participants, 53% indicated that they had significant prior interaction with people with disability. For their experience in teaching students with disabilities, 24% indicated that they had no prior experience, 40% had some experience, and 36% reported high levels of experience. Regarding ethnicity, 97% were Chinese or Asian, and 3% were Caucasian. For the mode of teaching, 71% indicated that they were teaching in non-inclusive classrooms with a further 29% teaching in inclusive classrooms. For the medium of instruction, 70% of participants were teaching in the Chinese language and 30% in English.

### 2.2 Instruments

General demographic information was collected about the teachers (e.g. gender, age, amount of training, interaction with people with a disability, experience in teaching students with SEN, ethnicity, mode of teaching and medium of instruction). Ten items were extracted from the SACIE-R (Sentiments, Attitudes, and Concerns about Inclusive Education-Revised) scale to identify teachers' sentiments toward and attitudes about inclusive education. The SACIE-R is a 15-item Likert type scale with the response anchors of: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = agree, and 4 = strongly agree, designed by Forlin, Earle, Loreman and Sharma (2011). Reliabilities of the internal consistency of the subscales were reported as moderate in the Forlin et al. paper with sentiments ( $\alpha = .75$ ) and attitudes ( $\alpha = .67$ ).

The SACIE-R scale included three scale components identified as *sentiments*, *attitudes* and *concerns* related to inclusive education. In this research, only the subscales of sentiments and attitudes were used. Five items in each sub scale measured sentiments towards people with disabilities (Table 1) and attitudes regarding acceptance of students with different types of disability (Table 2). A Chinese version of these 10 items was generated using the standard forward-backward translation procedure. Prior validation and previous reliabilities have been reportedly strong for the Chinese subscales (e.g. Poon, Ng, Wong, & Kaur, 2016; Tait & Mundia, 2014). It is important to note that some items in the SACIE-R scale such as "I am afraid to look directly at a person with a disability" and "*I find it difficult to overcome my initial shock when meeting people with physical disabilities*" may be perceived as biased which could potentially lead to overall negative sentiments towards people with a disability. While acknowledging this, the SACIE-R scale has been used widely with varied reports of

reliability and validity ranging from low to high. In this study reliability was moderate for both sub scales. Interpretations, therefore, should be undertaken with caution.

Of the 508 teachers who completed the survey, 20 (3 males & 17 females) were selected randomly from the cohort and invited to participate in a follow up interview. The medium of instruction was Chinese for 17 of them and English for the remaining three. A semi-structured interview protocol was developed to follow up on the results of the SACIE-R. Individual interviews aimed at understanding in greater depth their perceptions and acceptance of inclusive education. Questions such as "What is your understanding of "inclusive education?", "Do you think all schools in Macau should become inclusive?", "What are your views on including children with diverse disabilities in regular schools?", and "Do you feel prepared to teach in inclusive settings?" were used to initiate discussions.

### **2.3 Procedure**

A letter was sent to 10 large and medium sized private schools located at different neighbourhoods and serving diverse populations, that indicated they were offering inclusive education. Seven schools accepted to be part of the research, two having English as medium of instruction (EMI) and five using Chinese (CMI). One of the researchers contacted the respective school principals to further explain the process and purpose of the investigation and to get their informed consent. The principal was asked to give the survey to all teachers in the school and permission was sought to interview a small number of teachers with experience in teaching inclusive classes. Each school indicated three potential participants and the researchers contacted them directly to seek their availability and willingness to being interviewed. Sixteen individual interviews took place at the schools' facilities and four at the university (see Teixeira et al., 2017 for details of participants). A bilingual assistant was trained to conduct and record 17 interviews in Chinese language, which were subsequently translated and transcribed verbatim to English. The remaining three interviews were conducted and recorded in English by two of the researchers and later transcribed verbatim by the assistant. The transcripts underwent a preliminary reading by the researchers following which they were coded and analysed collaboratively by using NVivo software Version 11. Data were specifically coded for the independent variables used in the quantitative analysis, including experience and level of training. This allowed for reflective-interpretive data interrogation and analysis through reduction techniques and content analysis. Key issues that emerged from the qualitative data were used to support the quantitative data and provide greater depth to the findings. These are discussed in connection with the quantitative data analysis.

### **3. Results**

Descriptive data analysis was applied to identify the mean, SD and percentage of responses for each item. Cronbach's alpha indicated moderate reliability consistent with

previous reliabilities reported by the scale developers as 0.71 for sentiments and 0.70 for attitudes. Analysis of variance was undertaken for each of the two factors of sentiments and acceptance of the SACIE-R for potential differences between teachers depending upon their level of training on educating students with disabilities (none, some [minimum 20hrs], high [minimum 100hrs]) and level of experience in teaching a student with a disability (none, some, high [at least one school year]). Post hoc analysis using Bonferroni was undertaken to explore differences between the groups.

From the analysis of the quantitative survey and the interview data a number of key findings emerged. In this section both quantitative and qualitative data are considered iteratively to allow purposive comparisons between the questionnaires and the interviews. The 20 interviews with teachers are identified by numbers (T1 to T20) in the following section that focus on teachers' sentiments towards people with a disability and their attitudes towards acceptance of an inclusive paradigm.

### 3.1 Teachers' attitudes towards people with a disability

When asked to respond to the five items of the SACIE-R regarding their sentiments towards people with a disability, the participants mainly disagreed with the negative perceptions associated with meeting people with disability. They were least concerned about looking directly at a person with a disability but had stronger negative emotions regarding how they would feel if they had a disability (Table 1). Considering the percentage of responses for each category, approximately one quarter of the participants found it difficult to overcome their initial shock when meeting people with severe physical disability. A third dreaded the thought that they could eventually end up with a disability and 57% indicated that they would feel terrible if they had a disability.

**Table 1:** Percentage, Mean and SD for teachers' sentiments  
towards people with disabilities

Item	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	M	SD
I am afraid to look directly at a person with a disability.	3%	8%	53%	36%	3.22	0.72
I tend to make contacts with people with disabilities brief and I finish them as quickly as possible.	2%	16%	63%	18%	2.97	0.66
I find it difficult to overcome my initial shock when meeting people with severe physical disabilities.	3%	23%	56%	19%	2.90	0.73
I dread the thought that I could eventually end up with a disability.	7%	31%	41%	21%	2.76	0.86
I would feel terrible if I had a disability.	11%	46%	33%	9%	2.42	0.81

Note: Mean responses range from 1 (Strongly Agree); 2 (Agree); 3 (Disagree); 4 (Strongly Disagree). Missing data accounts for percentages not totalling 100%.

Analysis of variance to consider the impact of levels of training and previous experience in teaching students with disability, indicated some significant differences. For level of training significant differences were found for the sub scale of sentiments  $F(2, 492) = 3.958, p = .020$ . Post hoc analysis indicated the differences were significant between teachers who had some training ( $M=2.81, SD=.53$ ) and those who had high levels of training ( $M=3.02, SD=.55$ ), with the latter group being more positive about engaging with people with disability. For previous experience in teaching students with disability, significant differences were also found for sentiments  $F(2, 497) = 4.510, p = .011$ . Post hoc analysis indicated that responses between those with high ( $M=2.95, SD=.55$ ) and no experience ( $M=2.82, SD=.46$ ) were significant, suggesting that the more experienced teachers had the most positive emotions towards people with disability. Calculation of Cohen's effect sizes ( $\eta^2$ ) indicated that both significant differences were in the large range with,  $\eta^2 = .38$  for level of training and,  $\eta^2 = .26$  for experience.

Sentiments of uneasiness and distress were also revealed through the interviews but not often made manifest and translated into words; several participants steered the conversation toward parents, colleagues and peers of children with SEN. They attributed negative sentiments regarding the implementation of inclusion to both parents of regular children and parents of children with SEN. According to the teachers the parents of regular children were said to express sentiments of distress regarding inclusive settings and an unwillingness to have their children join inclusive classrooms. They also suggested that the parents of regular children fear that when children with SEN join a regular classroom, they may affect negatively the learning of the others. The interviewees entertained the possibility of the teacher lowering the standards to cope with the challenge of having disparate abilities and skills in the classroom. As said by one teacher, *"it is normal for a parent to prefer placing his child with others who are at a higher academic level. Being with someone who is smarter or with intellectually higher ability will somehow pull up the ability of their child"* (T3)

Superstitions were also attributed to parents by one participant, saying that *"there is also a superstitious belief from some parents whether this [disability] is contagious or not"* (T6). One teacher (T10) talked about how a child with SEN might generate sentiments of shame and face loss to the respective family. This participant perceived families as averting the topics related to their child's performance at school, hoping the problems would be solved in time without professional assistance. In some cases, the participant said, parents blame the teacher for not 'knowing how to teach' or reject the results of the assessment report after the child has been for diagnosed. In face of the distress generated by the presence of children with SEN in regular schools one participant mentioned the attitude of non-disclosure being held by some schools that may or may not involve other teachers, school staff and classmates. As mentioned by this participant, *"We try our best to protect the privacy, and will not let parents know about [the presence of the child with SEN]. If the situation allows, we even do not tell anyone which students are diagnosed with SEN"* (T6).



The participants also expressed their own emotions toward inclusive classrooms. The interview data show that especially the less experienced and less trained teachers teaching students with SEN tended to experience higher feelings of anxiety and emotional fatigue. Several participants suggested that they were not fully prepared to teach students with SEN. Whilst some considered they lacked skills and knowledge in teaching inclusive classrooms, some felt overwhelmed with the challenges. One teacher stated that, *"The challenge is that I'm afraid of this group of inclusive students..."* (T5). In the same vein, other participants expressed feelings of anxiety and insecurity when teaching inclusive classrooms, viewing themselves as being under-trained or under-skilled to meet the challenges of managing specific behaviours in inclusive classrooms; especially teachers new to an inclusive environment. These teachers felt that if they had support from therapists, psychologists, and counsellors and if the process of diagnosis could become faster it might be possible to overcome the challenges.

### 3.2 Teachers' attitudes towards acceptance of an inclusive paradigm

Teachers were asked to respond to five items of the SACIE-R regarding their attitudes towards accepting students requiring different levels of support based on their diverse needs (Table 2). Results indicated that they were not overly accepting of any of the groups of students, although they were more positive towards those with less severe needs. They were most supportive of including those who had verbal difficulties or who frequently failed exams and were slightly less supportive of those who were inattentive. Approximately one third of all teachers, nonetheless, still indicated that they were not supportive of including these groups of students. They tended to disagree, however, with the inclusion of students requiring an individual education program (IEP) and were even less in favour of including students in their classrooms who required specific communicative technologies, with only 38% of teachers agreeing they should be included in regular schools.

**Table 2:** Percentage, Mean and SD for teachers' attitudes  
towards people with disabilities

Item	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	M	SD
Students who have difficulty expressing their thoughts verbally should be in regular classes.	2%	29%	62%	4%	2.71	0.59
Students who frequently fail exams should be in regular classes.	4%	27%	62%	6%	2.71	0.63
Students who are inattentive should be in regular classes.	4%	34%	57%	5%	2.62	0.64
Students who need an individual education program should be in regular classes.	5%	46%	43%	5%	2.48	0.68
Students who require communicative technologies (e.g. Braille /sign language) should be in regular classes.	10%	51%	33%	5%	2.71	0.59

Note: Mean responses range from 1 (Strongly Disagree); 2 (Disagree); 3 (Agree); 4 (Strongly Agree). Missing data accounts for percentages not totalling 100%.

Analysis of variance to consider the impact of levels of training and previous experience in teaching students with disability, indicated some significant differences for attitudes towards including students with different needs. For level of training significant differences were found for the sub scale of attitudes  $F(2, 492) = 2.895, p = .056$ . Post hoc analysis, however, did not identify any significant differences between groups, although there was a linear movement indicating the higher the level of training the more positive were the teachers' attitudes towards including students with more challenging needs. For previous experience in teaching students with disability, significant differences were also found for attitudes towards acceptance of students with different needs  $F(2, 497) = 3.310, p = .037$ . Post hoc analysis indicated no significant group differences, although a similar directional progression was evident with the more experienced teachers reporting more positive attitudes towards accepting different students.

The interview data highlighted that teachers held distinct knowledge and acceptance of an inclusive paradigm. The teachers with longer training in special education and teachers who received their training overseas reported higher levels of acceptance of the inclusive paradigm than those with less or no training, little experience of teaching inclusive classrooms and no overseas training. The former group of teachers expressed a more informed and positive attitude towards the full inclusion of students with SEN, as in the case of the following participant:

*"[Inclusive classrooms] allow regular students to learn about acceptance. Our world is made of variety: different places, different economic status, different cultures, different family background... children need to accept the differences. If they have to join other children who are really different, for them is good. They can broaden their perspective. It's not that if I don't like this person, I can delete him. This cannot be like this. Tolerance cannot be taught through the textbooks. It's the assignment of your life." (T 2)*

Teachers with more experience were able to take a critical stand in regard to the current placement model and the implications of it for the inclusive schools in terms of naming and labelling:

*"If all children with SEN are going to be concentrated in very few schools, it's going to be a burden for these schools. Those few schools will be labelled, and they will lose students because of that label. But if every school takes students with SEN, this will not happen. The schools will not be labelled as inclusive or non-inclusive, because all will be inclusive." (T5)*

Conversely, teachers with less experience of students with SEN in regular classrooms were not unrestrictedly accepting of those students, as reported by one participant:

*"I think those too emotional are not suitable [to join regular classrooms]. For instance, reading and writing disabilities - I can teach them how to write, but if the student is aggressive it will be more troublesome [...]. I understand they have SEN, but just because of one student most of the others are affected. This will not be fair for the others."* (T12)

The teachers' assumptions suggested a focus on the maladjustment of the student instead of maladjustment of the system, which is similarly illustrated by another interviewee: *"The very low achievers should be in special schools. Their cognitive ability is weaker than the classmates and will be very difficult for them to follow"* (T 10). In this excerpt, the interviewee apparently focusses the needs of the child with SEN instead of the interests of the peers. The argument, though, unveils the concept of difference as deficiency belonging to the individual child. The decision to separate the child from the group as a means to protect her from lagging behind the others in a competitive environment is regarded as the only possible solution. As proposed by one of the teachers: *"We need to consider if the inclusive student can adapt and merge or not [with the class]"* (T 13).

The lack of sufficient training is one of the difficulties mentioned by the teachers, who said that current training provided by the government is short and sketchy and does not actually assist with difficult situations in the classroom.

When teachers were asked about their acceptance of students who require communicative technologies in the regular classroom most participants could not recall any case of such. A participant claimed that the school in which she works accepts *"mainly those [students] with borderline cognitive functioning or above. [...] No physical disabilities"* (T20). This suggests that some schools, although they identified themselves as inclusive, are using discreet approaches to prevent students with physical/communicative disabilities gaining acceptance.

The majority of the interviewees indicated distrust on the value of the inclusion paradigm, as explained by one teacher:

*"Now, we have inclusive schools and non-inclusive ones. When the parents are looking for a school, they have this knowledge in advance and they can select the school accordingly. This gives them more confidence. If the parent's child is an inclusive student, they can go to the school that accept inclusive students. I do not think all schools should accept inclusive students."* (T4)

In analysing the teachers' perspectives of the inclusive paradigm, it is worth noting that during the interviews teachers used a variety of terms and expressions to refer to students with SEN and inclusion. While for instance T4 refers to *"inclusive students"* in substitution of *"students with SEN"*, other interviewees opted to refer to students with SEN as *"retarded"* and in one interview the use of *"gifted students"* was selected over *"students with SEN"*. The use of inconsistent terminology reflects the

participants' lack of exposure to and knowledge about special and inclusive education but may also result from their unsettlement in regard to people with disability.

These participants viewed both parents of regular children and parents of children with SEN, school leaders, policy-makers and the community at large as being reticent toward the paradigm of inclusion, and therefore unaccommodating the implementation of it.

#### **4. Discussion**

Inclusion is a term that has only recently been adopted in Macau and its which meaning appears to be rather ambiguous. The teachers' statements reveal an inconsistent use of terminology related to disability and inclusion, exemplified by terms and expressions such as "normal" instead of "regular" students, "inclusive students" and "gifted students" as synonymous of "students with SEN", "handicapped" instead of "disabled" and in a few interviews an interchangeable use of the terms "inclusion" and "integration". Inclusion and disability are conceptual tools and as such they need to assist in planning and implementing social change in a clear and consistent direction. As they are grounded in and reflect cultural, social and institutional visions of disability, they should not be overlooked. On the contrary, they require close examination and reflexivity (Shyman, 2016). The terms used to refer people with disabilities, such as "handicapped", have stigmatising implications and detrimental effects in the lives of individuals.

The irregular, uncertain, oversimplified or binary use of terminology in academic, social, political or institutional contexts is a marker of difference that tends to reinforce human divides and discriminatory practices. They are per se obstacles to promote human capacity and diversity. As human relationships tend to be viewed as rather hierarchical in the Confucian-heritage culture, language practices that elicit binaries and categorical differences might reinforce inequalities and marginalisation. A risk pointed out by Kozleski and Waitoller (2010) regarding inclusive education, is that some differences may develop into deficits while others become invisible.

In this research, participants' understanding of inclusion is closer to the internationally accepted concept of integration; a system in which the child is expected to adapt to an unchanged system. Within this frame of mind, a teacher may argue that she needs to "protect" the class from the potential disruption caused by students with SEN, who are deemed troublesome. The students, not the system, are seen as the locus of the problem and the proposed solution is either accepting or removing them, subject to their capacity to adjust to the system. The argument of fairness to other children and the utilitarian notion that underpins some participants' statements in this research are in line with discourses of economic viability of education and support the Confucian approach. Ambiguity and inconsistency regarding the meaning of inclusive education has been reported in less developed as well as developed countries (Forlin, 2013). Terminology regarding disability and inclusion should be grounded in the social

context of Macau, to ensure that it does not reinforce markers of difference. An approach that emphasises the use of tests to classify and sort students according to categories of impairments, based on the medical model of disability, functions as a stratification tool which in practice diminishes the educational opportunities for students with SEN.

This research found that the teachers' acceptance of the inclusive paradigm ranges from disinclination to restrictiveness, with a minority of them, namely the ones with more training and greater previous experience with teaching students with SEN, indicating their support to the proposed inclusive education reform. At present, private schools, which offer formal education to 96,5% of the students, are not obliged to accept students with SEN. These schools are usually highly exclusive, and placements are offered after personal interviews with the candidates starting from infant education (Teixeira et al., 2017). The quasi absence of students with physical and communicative disabilities in regular schools, as reported by the participants, is mainly a result of the abovementioned structure of the Macau schooling system, but it also resonates the invisibility of people with physical disabilities reported by investigations in contemporary Mainland China (Campbell & Uren, 2011) and other Confucian cultures in Asia (Forlin, 2013). The Confucian approach tends to see disability as a tragedy that hits the family and deeply affects the lives of each of its members (Chiang & Hadadian, 2007; Tait et. al., 2016). Caring for people with disabilities is mainly viewed as a family duty as the former are not perceived as productive members of society.

The unwillingness of many private school teachers to accept students with SEN as found in this research, especially as the level of disability increases, together with a climate of competitiveness and the influence of the Confucian worldview, may explain the low numbers of students with SEN attending regular schools. According to the participants this is accentuated in the case of students with physical disabilities. Similar findings were noted in a large sample of 1538 pre-service teachers in Singapore (Thaver & Lim, 2014). This subsequently, prevents teachers to be exposed to and become accustomed with diverse children. Insufficient contacts with people with disabilities gives room for the perpetuation of bygone age superstitions inbred within the Confucian heritage, such as fearing that the health condition of students with disabilities might be contagious to the non-disabled students - a disquiet attributed to parents but likely to be shared within other segments of the community. These superstitions have underlying roots in the popular culture in Macao and impact negatively the process of embracing the inclusion paradigm. Limiting access to regular schools of students with SEN may allow unfounded held beliefs to remain unchallenged (Teixeira et al., 2017). The feelings of uneasiness in face of physically different people might be better minimised if schools embrace all children irrespective of their physical, psychological or social exceptionalities. Besides exposure to students with disabilities, experience of teaching within inclusive settings and training about learners with diverse needs, is found to contribute substantially to raising teachers' acceptance of inclusion and confidence in its sustainability.

Even though the Confucian heritage culture may have been responsible for contributing to exclusionary practices in society, certain aspirational tenets within this rich tradition may be creatively re-tuned and modernized to serve the purpose of inclusion instead. The Confucian idea of tolerance is a strong value that may assist in this mission. Tolerance (in Chinese language *shu*) has been continuously emphasised in the Chinese tradition for over 2000 years. It appears in maxims and aphorisms in numerous classic works and lies in the foundation of Chinese culture. Sometimes compared to the Kantian imperative or the Golden Rule (Gu, 2016), *shu* was given a definition in the dialogue between Confucius' disciple Zigong and the Master (Analects 15/4), when stated by Zigong: "*Is there one expression that can be acted upon until the end of one's days?*" Confucius replied: "*There is shu: do not impose on others what you do not want*" (Ames & Rosemont 1998, p. 189).

Tolerance in Confucian tradition is a moral virtue and a human ideal. In the spirit of Confucian tradition, tolerance resonates with human kindness and love and with respect for others and recognition of differences (Gu, 2016). Mozi, a Chinese philosopher promoting the idea of universal love, stated that "One should regard another person's country as though it were his own country, another person's family as it though it were his own family, and another person's body as it though it were his own body" (in Gu, 2016; Mo Di 墨翟, Mozi 墨子 (Mozi / *The Mencius*), *juan 4*, in *Ershi'er zi 二十二子* (Writings of twenty-two masters) (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 1986, p. 236). This might be a foundation for the advocacy of a new approach of disability and inclusion among Chinese societies. Drawing on historically and culturally grounded visions of social ethics enables better understanding of the dilemmas and strains faced by the various stakeholders in the current transitional period Macau is passing through, as it aims to establish sustainable inclusive practices. Moreover, this would strengthen the capacity to address the issues from a point of view that conflates time-honoured cultural values and the requirements of the 21<sup>st</sup> century education.

## 5. Conclusion

Confucianism is the axis around which all Chinese people's social and interpersonal relations revolve. As a society within this sphere, Macau is undeniably influenced by the values of Confucianism, irrespective of simultaneously being a hub for non-Confucian-heritage cultures. Understanding the dynamics prompted during the current planning of new legislation and policies about inclusion through the lens of Confucian values, sheds light on areas that would not otherwise be possible to explore.

In this research, the teachers were not openly accepting of inclusion and attributed to parents and principals' attitudes of aloofness regarding the success and sustainability of the inclusion paradigm. They were, however, more positive with training and with experience in teaching students with disability. To contend that these findings shall be attributed solely to the influence of Confucian values would be unreasonable. Yet, it must be acknowledged that the macro-level of policy planning and

the micro level of teachers' sentiments and beliefs toward inclusion seem to shape each other. The government as well as the teachers are inclined to a vision of inclusion that considers the benefits of keeping both inclusive and segregated settings in the future built upon a medical view of disability. This approach might be linked to Confucian values, as the cultures of Confucian heritage are known by an *"attitude of sympathy toward but neglect of the education of children with disabilities"* (Deng, Poon-McBrayer, & Farnsworth, 2001, p. 292).

This research concludes four aspects to be addressed if a significant improvement in including all children in regular schools is to be achieved. The first is the need to clarify the concept of inclusion at government, school, and teacher levels, as it currently has ambiguous meaning. The second is to provide teachers with more opportunities to have systematic contacts with students with SEN, as this is crucial to change their sentiments and attitudes toward people with disability. The third is to provide more professional learning about inclusive education, and the fourth is to review the hidden influence of the subtle levels of time-honoured beliefs, which are not manifest nor easily detected but possibly have a deep impact on day-to-day practices. They can powerfully influence the attitudes of people in both positive and negative ways. Within the Confucian heritage culture, it is the role of policy makers, scholars and teacher educators to retrieve the essential contribution of the Confucian tradition to propel the move of 21<sup>st</sup> century schools into inclusion.

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